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**For Immediate Release**

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**Refugio Oil Spill Inspires Action  
Toward a Post-oil Era**

*Environmental Leader Paul Relis Speaks Out On a Path Forward*

**Santa Barbara, CA, May 21, 2015** – In the aftermath of the massive Refugio Oil Spill, which dumped an estimated 100,000 gallons of oil into the waters off of Gaviota Coast on Tuesday, many different viewpoints have been expressed. Rarely do you hear the measured response of someone who has been through this battle before.

Long-time activist and author Paul Relis is such a man. In 1969, he had a front row seat to the massive Santa Barbara spill, whose effects were so devastating they sparked a national environmental movement. At that time, Relis helped found a grassroots organization, Community Environmental Council, to take action toward cleaner energy. Little did he know that this would be the cause he devoted his life to. Today, Relis spoke out to share his thoughts on this week's tragedy, comparing what's happening now to what happened then.

"Really, any spill of this magnitude is a tragedy, and the location on the Gaviota Coast could not be worse," stated Relis. "But one major difference is that 45 years ago, we had no idea how to break our addiction to oil. Now we do. Now we have both the policy tools and the technology to make this transition. Those are two powerful drivers."

The spill, which dumped thousands of gallons of crude oil into the waters and beaches along a 4-mile stretch of the Gaviota Coast, was caused when an underground line owned by Plains All American Pipeline ruptured on Tuesday.

Relis has had front-line experience working in – and with – California government for more than 20 years, and in that time he says he's never seen the dynamics or commitment present today to make renewable energy a core part of the state's future. "It's kind of breathtaking," Paul commented. "California is without question a global leader when it comes to renewable energy, and state energy policies are moving us even further in that direction." As an example, he cited Governor Jerry Brown's announcement in January that the state will reduce petroleum demand by 50% by 2030. "That's a huge commitment from the third largest state in the nation.

Relis became founding Executive Director of the Community Environmental Council (CEC) at age 23, and for 20 years he stayed in that position, helping to shape Santa Barbara's future by pioneering programs for recycling, urban



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gardening, solar energy, and green design and building. He went on to serve on the California Integrated Waste Management Board in Sacramento, California, implementing the state's nation-leading recycling program.

Relis' reflections bring a long-game perspective of where the environmental movement has been, and where it is going.

At the current moment, despite the fact that oil has devastated yet another pristine marine ecosystem, Relis feels a strong sense of hope. What was a pipe dream for his organization in 1969 – a real alternative to dependence on oil -- is now within reach.

In fact, he sees this as a pivotal moment in history. While the Refugio Oil Spill is indeed a grim reminder of the necessity of moving renewable energy to the forefront, it could also be the catalyst to motivate Santa Barbara's citizens to tap their environmental legacy and move away from oil entirely. "With opportunities like Community Choice Energy (a program whereby cities purchase renewable energy from private companies instead of using traditional fossil-fuel based electricity of public utilities), the Santa Barbara region could be demanding that 100% of our electricity come from wind and solar," Relis commented. "How amazing would that be? And with electric vehicles changing the transportation sector, I can now envision us entering a post-oil era."

Today Paul is a Board Emeritus of CEC and is engaged in the development of one of the largest facilities in North America to convert municipal organic waste to a carbon-negative fuel to power heavy-duty engines, a landmark effort to end dependence on fossil fuels. His recent biography, *Out of the Wasteland: Stories from the Environmental Frontier*, details the evolution of the environmental movement in his 40+ year career, emphasizing the positive changes that have occurred in that time.

Relis' final message when it comes to tragedies like this week's oil spill once again reflects wisdom gained over a lifetime of fighting to do right by the environment. He states, "I want future generations to understand that, yes, it's maddening that we are still repeating the same lessons of 45 years ago. But now we actually have a road out. I say we take it." Visit <http://www.PaulRelis.com> to learn more about Paul's take on the environmental movement.

#### About the Community Environmental Council

In the wake of the devastating 1969 oil spill off Santa Barbara's shores, a group of local concerned citizens began talking about a different way of looking at environmental systems. During that time, Senator Gaylord Nelson visited Santa Barbara to view the damage from the oil spill. When he returned to Washington, D.C., he introduced a bill designating April 22 as a national day to celebrate the earth. Over the next few years, around the country the environmental movement was born – including the Community Environmental Council (CEC). In CEC's first



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act as a newly incorporated nonprofit, it hosted one of the first Earth Day celebrations in the U.S. in 1970.

Since that time, CEC has remained at the forefront of the environmental movement, leading the Santa Barbara region – and at times California and the nation – in creative solutions to some of the toughest environmental problems. For over 45 years, CEC has been working to move our region off of fossil fuels. Today CEC is also focused on the climate, encouraging global change through local action with five initiatives: Drive Less, Choose Electric, Go Solar, Ditch Plastic, and Eat Local.

For more information on CEC:

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